

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 05 TEL AVIV 001698

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

JERUSALEM ALSO FOR ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO
E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: IS_KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

11. Mideast
12. Iraq: Anniversary of War's Outbreak

Key stories in the media:

Jordanian King Abdullah paid a secret visit to Prime Minister's Ariel Sharon Shikmim ranch, Ha'aretz and Yediot reported. The media noted that there are no details regarding the contents of the meeting but that most probably the two leaders discussed the Israeli disengagement plan and its possible implications on the implementation of the road map for an Israeli-Palestinian agreement.

All media highlighted Pakistani belief that they have cornered and perhaps wounded Osama bin Laden's deputy, Ayman al-Zawahri, in a major battle near the Afghan border.

The media quoted a GSS report released on Thursday in which it exposes that it thwarted 15 attempts by West Bank terror groups to commit terror activity against Israel, since the beginning of the year. Among these attempts was a Tanzim led group's plan to hijack an Israeli bus and to hold the hostages in Bethlehem in order to get Palestinian prisoners released. The GSS officials also revealed that P.A. security forces members are involved in the exposed terror cells.

Jerusalem Post cited Washington sources as saying that the U.S. may postpone its announcement of the sanctions it will impose on Syria until after the Arab League assembly in Tunis, so as not to anger Arab allies.

Yated Ne'eman cited senior Palestinian officials as saying that the U.S., Britain and Egypt are preparing plans for the day after Yasser Arafat departs from ruling the Palestinian Authority. The plans involve Jordan and Egypt so at the end of the process these two countries would open their gates for Palestinian workers.

Ha'aretz reported that a commander of an Israeli Defense Forces tank battalion would be indicted for causing the deaths of four Palestinian through negligence in a 2002 incident.

Jerusalem Post and Ha'aretz reported that the daughters of Israeli Air Force Colonel Joe Alon, who was shot in Washington while serving there as assistant military attach, have filed a petition at the High Court of Justice against the Israeli government demanding all the information gathered about his death. The daughters also filed a request for the FBI file on the case under America's Freedom of Information Act.

Ha'aretz reported that Britain is refusing to sell military equipment to Israel. The paper noted that the British excuse for the embargo is the Israeli government's policy towards the Palestinians. All media reported that Major General Dan Halutz is to be the next Deputy Chief of Staff.

Ha'aretz reported that three Palestinians were lightly wounded on Thursday in clashes with IDF forces during a demonstration against the separation fence. Radio stations reported today that two Israeli soldiers were wounded when a bomb detonated by Hamas militants overturned an Israel Defense Forces tank during a

military raid near the Gaza Strip settlement of Netzarim.

Yediot and Maariv reported that several Hollywood stars such as Jennifer Aniston, Sharon Stone, Denzel Washington and more are slated to participate in an evening saluting Israel. The main speaker of the evening will be Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom.

11. Mideast:

Summary:

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "Sharon's great, Sisyphean task now is to achieve synchronization between Danny Ben Lulu's [a Likud Central Committee member] electoral aspirations and George Bush's electoral aspirations."

Military correspondent Alex Fishman wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "The Americans listened and did not answer. They will give thier answers -- if and when -- to the Prime Minister. And it is unnecessary to say that if Sharon returns from Bush with empty hands, the move won't take place."

Block Quotes:

11. "George Bush, Insurance Corp."

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (March 19): "For Sharon to be able to pass the withdrawal plan in the government and the Likud, he needs a festive reception in the U.S., perhaps on the ranch in Texas, perhaps at Camp David, perhaps in a historic ceremony on the White House lawn. Mainly he needs a presidential declaration that he can flourish. But before the president makes his declaration, he needs to be sure that Sharon will make his plan pass in the Israeli political establishment. Otherwise, his efforts will have been to no avail. Sharon's great, Sisyphean task now is to achieve synchronization between Danny Ben Lulu's [a Likud Central Committee member] electoral aspirations and George Bush's electoral aspirations."

12. "Waiting for an Invitation"

Military correspondent Alex Fishman wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (March 19): "Even if the Americans are starting to digest the [disengagement plan] idea they are still withholding Sharon's invitation to Washington. And the Prime Minister is impatiently waiting for this invitation in order to bring what Israel needs in order to begin the move: an American public support, an economic compensation and "back wind" against the majority in his government, who oppose the plan. An American recognition, even a general one, for settlement blocks in the West Bank, would help him greatly. The Minister of Defense [Shaul Mofaz] tried to satisfy the Americans by using a general formula: supporting the large settlement blocks does not contradict the traditional American policy, which talks about strategic depth and defensible borders.... The Americans listened and did not answer. They will give thier answers -- if and when -- to the Prime Minister. And it is unnecessary to say that if Sharon returns from Bush with empty hands, the move won't take place."

12. Iraq: Anniversary of War's Outbreak:

Summary:

Washington correspondent Nathan Guttman wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: " A year after Bush started a war in order to bestow democracy on Iraq it is becoming clear to him that the world did not unite with him even after the victory."

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "On balance, Bush's decision to make it impossible for Saddam to make war was justified, and even essential, for the future of the region."

Block Quotes:

11. "Bush Imagined a Different Scenario"

Washington correspondent Nathan Guttman wrote in independent, left-leaning *Ha'aretz* (March 19): "A year after Bush started a war in order to bestow democracy on Iraq it is becoming clear to him that the world did not unite with him even after the victory. If Bush and his men believed that from the moment Saddam Hussein's regime falls the countries of the world would understand their mistake and support the war, the elections in Spain, the polls in Europe and Arab countries position, proved to him that he was left alone.... The struggle for American public opinion over the war is at its height.... The war in Iraq did not succeed in building George Bush's image as a leading commander enjoying the American public's trust.... Opposite stands John Kerry and the Democrats, who talk about the mistaken information, the international isolation and the entanglement continuing on the ground. So was it a good year for Bush? The answer to that question will be given only on November 2 when the American public's voice is heard."

12. "The Year of Iraq"

Independent, left-leaning *Ha'aretz* editorialized (March 19): "One year ago today, the American assault on Saddam Hussein's regime began. It has been a year of many ups and downs: The first strike on Saddam's hiding place failed; the military campaign to conquer Baghdad and overthrow the regime succeeded; the American effort to immediately establish a peaceful, democratic Iraq failed; the operation to capture Saddam succeeded; the effort to cope with acts of guerrilla warfare, terrorism and sabotage against the American occupation army and its allies failed. Upon hearing the frequent reports of attacks in which Americans and Iraqis are killed, it is very tempting to label President George W. Bush's Iraqi adventure as an expensive entanglement that is likely to end badly. But this would be to take the narrow-minded, short-range view. On balance, Bush's decision to make it impossible for Saddam to make war was justified, and even essential, for the future of the region.... In the strategic context, Israel should benefit from the war in Iraq. The eastern front has collapsed, in a manner that justifies updating our security concept and our defense budget.... The Middle East now lies at the heart of American policy, and one can only hope that after the November elections, the U.S. administration will find time to settle the Israeli-Arab conflict."

KURTZER